TRENDS IN THE LENGTH OF TIME INCARCERATED IN
MASSACHUSETTS CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS: 1945-1966

Massachusetts Department of Correction

John J. Fitzpatrick
Commissioner

Researcher:

Louis M. Berman
Northeastern University
Cooperative Education Program
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Social Science Research Specialist
Francis J. Carney

INTRODUCTION

An analysis of the Annual Statistical Report of the Commissioner of Corrections over the past twenty years reveals an interesting pattern in the inmate populations of adult male institutions. The yearly number of admissions has increased somewhat, while the average daily population has decreased rather sharply. This finding suggests that there has been an overall decline in the length of time served for various offenses.

The goal of this study is to explore this issue by providing a longitudinal analysis of the length of time served by a random sample of inmates released from the supervision of the Department over the past twenty years.

This is the first report in a series, culminating six months of research. This segment of the analysis includes only the empirical data resulting from this research. Future reports will try to interpret the data relating to the trends of incarceration and also other salient information which came to the surface as a result of this project.

METHODOLOGY

The Sample. A systematic random sample was selected from the discharge books of all Massachusetts Correctional Institutions for males (except Bridgewater) from 1945 through 1966. Initially, every tenth name of those released to the community was recorded. However, in order to make the sample more manageable in terms of time available for data collection, the sampling technique was changed to·the selection of every fifteenth name. Thus for the years 1964-1965 the ratio was one out of ten, while for all other years of the study it was one out of fifteen. Those subjects who received additional time because they committed a new offense while serving their original commitment were dropped from the study. This sampling procedure resulted in the selection of 1204 subjects.

Data Collection. Data were collected for each of the chosen subjects from the files of the Central Office of the Department of Correction. This entailed referring to active, inactive and in many cases microfilmed sources of data. Variables on which information was collected for analysis are included on the "Data Sheet For Length of Sentence Study" (See last page).

Since the focus of this study is on actual length of incarceration for various offenses, it is important to clearly define "time served". It refers to the time span between the date of admission to the institution and the date of release to the community. This does not include jail credits i.e. the time spent in jail prior to and during trial which may be subtracted from the inmate's sentence.* For those serving incarcerations for parole violations the "time served" is still calculated from the inclusive dates of their original commitments.

Analysis. This study is divided into two phases. In Phase One the offenses are grouped in general categories and analyzed on a year by year basis. Phase Two reverses the procedure of analysis by examining the offenses separately and dividing the time span into two ten-year periods.

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*Jail Credit Law - Chapter 350, Acts and Resolves of Massachusetts 1960

Each of the linear graphs in Phase One is based on a five-year floating average principle. That is, each year on the graph actually represents the average values of that year, the two preceding years, and the two following years. This method was found to be the most effective when trying to minimize the misleading effect of the longer incarcerations on the overall average.

PHASE ONE

In this portion of the study the various types of offenders were grouped in four general categories:

VS. PERSON	SEX OFFENDERS	VS. PROPERTY	MISC.
N=475	N=165	N=472	N=93
1. Armed Robbery	1. Carnal Abuse	1. Breaking, Entering	1. Motor Vehicle
2. Robbery	2. Rape	and Larceny	Violators
3. Aggravated Assaults	3. Sodomy and	2. Larceny	2. Narcotics Offenders
4. Manslaughter	Unnatural Acts	3. Forgery & Uttering	3. Carrying Weapons
5. Murder (2nd Degree)	4. Incest	4. Common and	4. Escape
6. Abortion	5. Indecent A & B	Notorious Thief	5. Bribery
7. Kidnapping	6. Open & Gross Lewdness	5. Arson	
	7. Adultery	6. Possession of	
	8. Polygamy	Burglary Tools	
	9. Lewd and	7. Handling Stolen	
	Lascivious Cohabitation	Goods	

The categories as a whole and then separately (except for Misc.) were analyzed on a year by year basis in order to spotlight trends in the average lengths of incarceration over the past two decades. The findings are illustrated on the following four graphs:

Graph #1 - _All_ Offenders - This, the most general of graphs, indicates a gradual decline in the average length of incarcerations. The higher terms seem to be served in the early fifties while the later fifties reveal the lower ones. Since this period, the average length of time served seems to remain fairly stable.

Graph #2 - _Vs._ Person Offenders - This graph is by far the most stable of the four over the twenty-year period. The highest and lowest years do not vary more than five months.

Graph #3 - _Sex_ Offenders - This graph indicates a rapid decline from the early fifties to the early sixties in the average length of imprisonment. However, a recent upward trend is also evident.

Graph #4 - <u>Vs</u>. <u>Property</u> <u>Offenders</u> - The trends on this graph seem to closely resemble those on graph #1 (all offenders). A gradual decline occurs, with the higher length of imprisonment occuring in the early fifties and the lower ones in the late fifties. Again the period of stability takes place in the sixties.

ALL OFFENDERS

FIVE YEAR

FLOATING

AVERAGE

1947-1964

MONTHS

45

40

35

30

25

20

15

YEARS

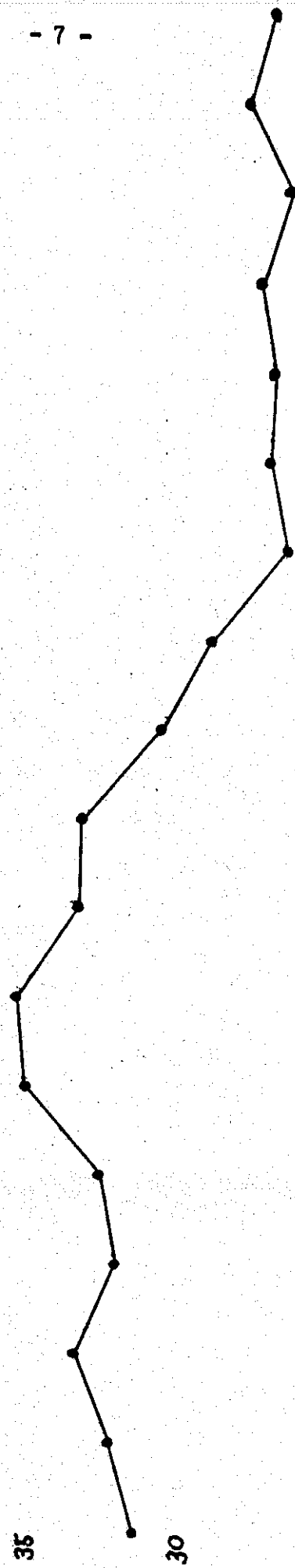47 48 49 60 61 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64

VS. PERSON

FIVE YEAR

FLOATING

AVERAGE

1947-1964

MONTHS

YEARS

- 8 -
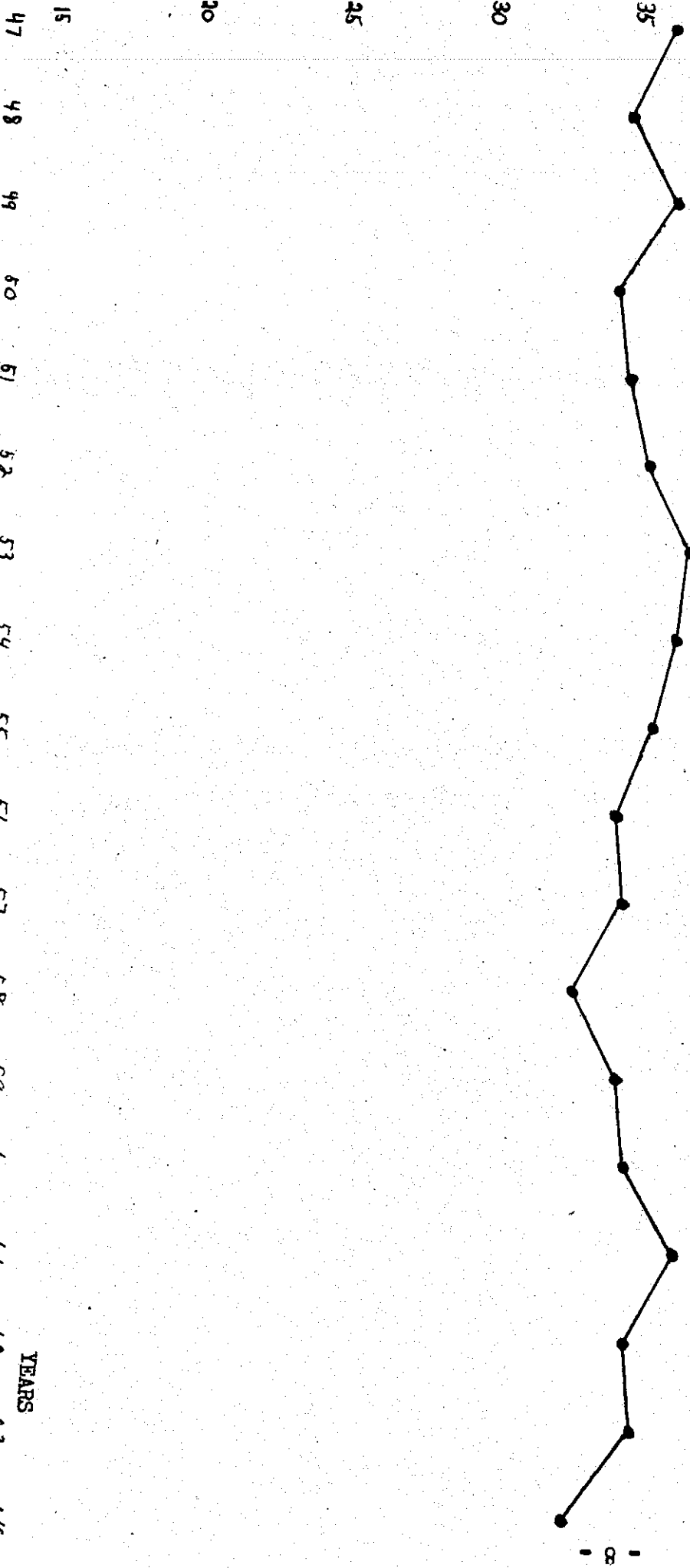
SEX OFFENDERS

FIVE YEAR

FLOATING

AVERAGE

1947-1964

YEARS

MONTHS

47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64

45 20 25 30 35 40 45
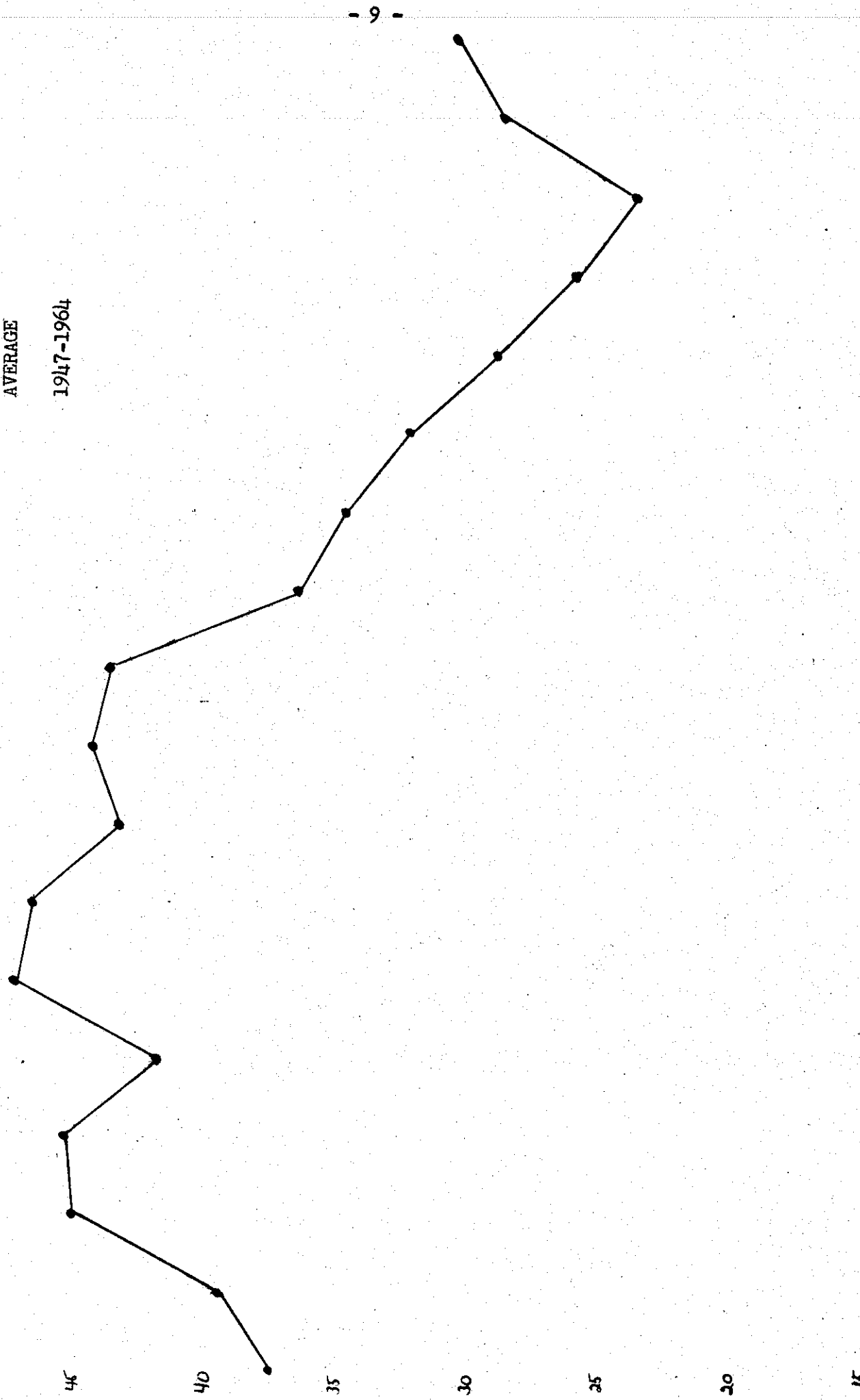
VS. PROPERTY

FIVE YEAR

FLOATING

AVERAGE

1947-1964

MONTHS

45

40

35

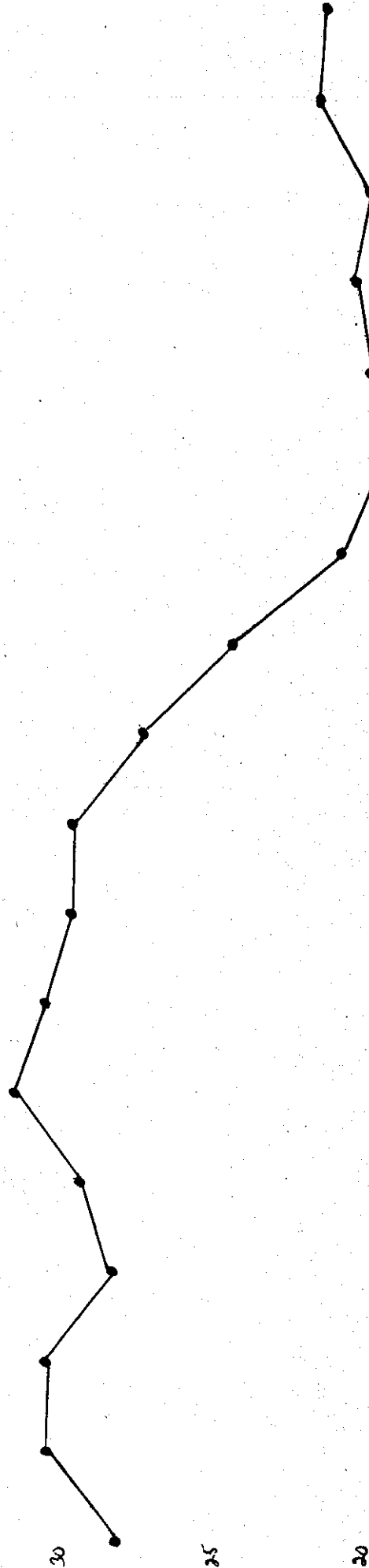30

25

20

15

YEARS

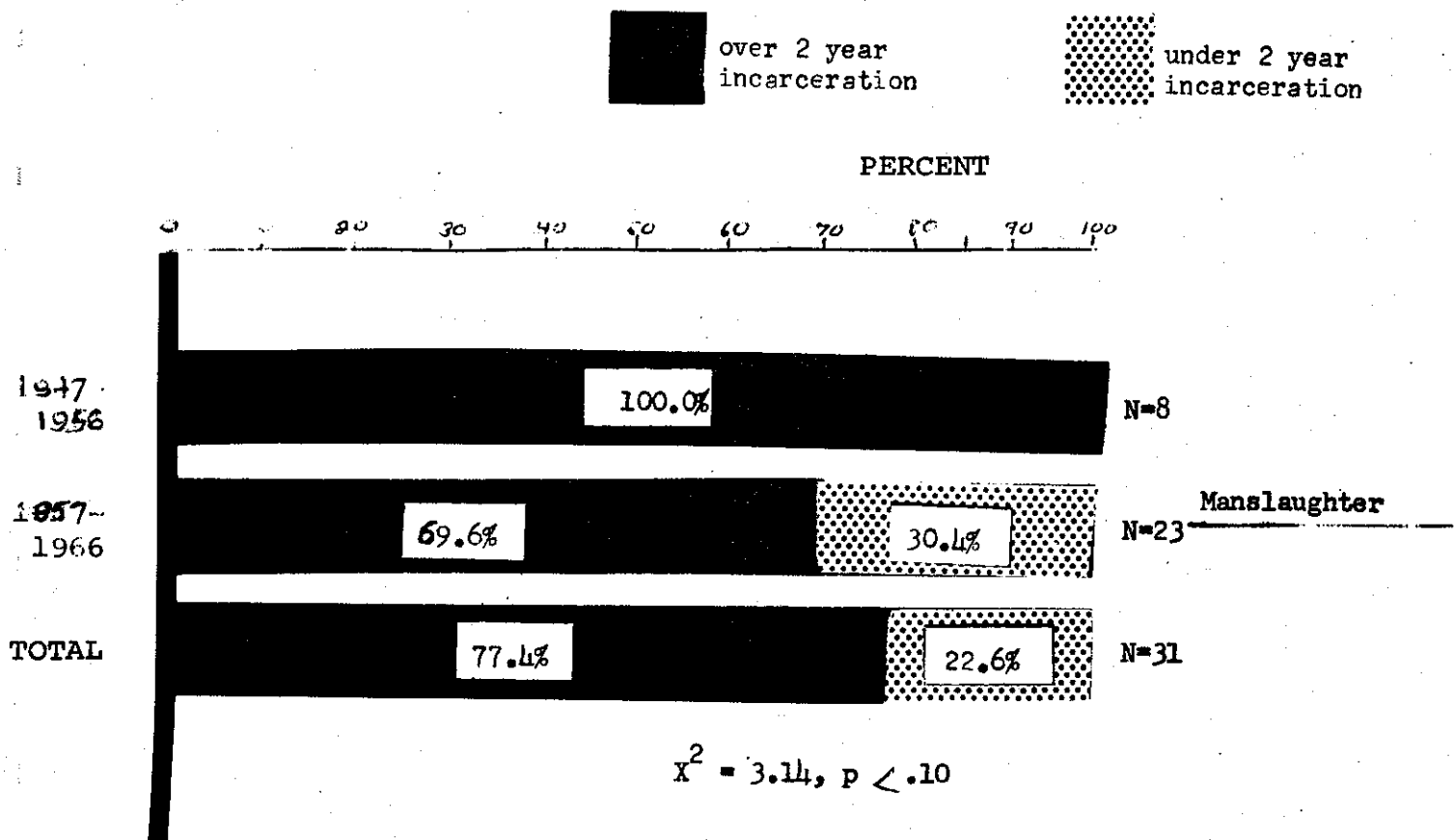47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 55 56 57 58 59 60 61 62 63 64

PHASE TWO

In this section different methods were used to analyse the collected data. Instead of examining the offenders in general categories, as in the preceding sections, each offense was looked at separately. Also this section does not analyze on a year by year basis but groups them in two ten-year spans.

One major problem encountered was that not all the types of offenses studied in Phase One were numerous enough in the overall sample to be analyzed separately. Only the following ten offenses qualified:

1. Breaking, Entering, & Larceny
2. Larceny
3. Motor Vehicle Offenses
4. Carnal Abuse
5. Rape

6. Unnatural Acts & Sodomy
7. Armed Robbery
8. Robbery
9. Aggravated Assault
10. Manslaughter

The percentages were calculated, for each offense, according to the number of offenders who spent two years or more in our state institutions and those who spent less than two years. The time segments were 1947-1956; 1957-1966. The total was also figured.
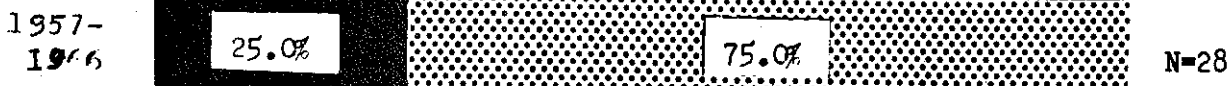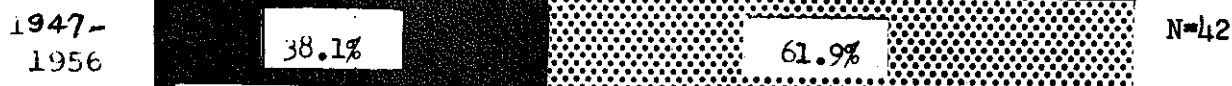
■ over 2 year incarceration   ▦ under 2 year incarceration

PERCENT

1947 1956	100.0%		N=8
1957 1966	69.6%	30.4%	N=23 Manslaughter
TOTAL	77.4%	22.6%	N=31

$$x^2 = 3.14, \ p < .10$$

PERCENT

0   10   20   30   40   50   60   70   80   90   100

1947-
1956   48.2%   51.8%   N=114

1957-
1966   22.2%   77.8%   N=194   **Breaking, Entering,
and Larceny**
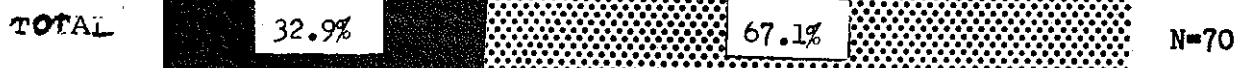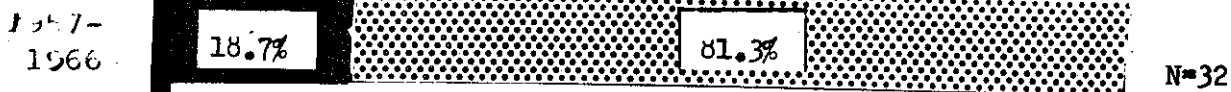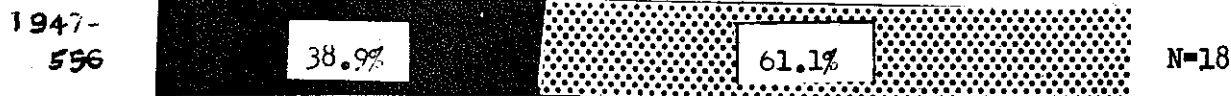
TOTAL   31.8%   68.2%   N=308

$X^2 = 22.51, p < .001$

1947-
1956   38.1%   61.9%   N=42

1957-
1966   25.0%   75.0%   N=28   Larceny

TOTAL   32.9%   67.1%   N=70

$X^2 = 1.31, p < .30$

1947-
556   38.9%   61.1%   N=18

1947-
1966   18.7%   81.3%   N=32   Motor Vehicle Offenses

TOTAL   26.0%   74.0%   N=50
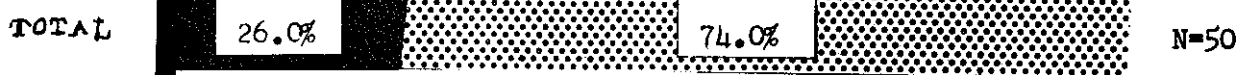
$X^2 = 2.43, p < .20$

10   20   30   40   50   60   70   80   90   100

1947-
1956   65.6%   34.4%   N=32

1957-
1966   23.3%   76.7%   N=30   Carnal Abuse

TOTAL   45.2%   54.8%   N=62

$$x^2 = 11.18, p < .001$$

1947-
1956   81.8%   18.2%   N=22

1957-
1966   52.9%   47.1%   N=17   Rape

TOTAL   69.2%   30.8%   N=39

$$x^2 = 3.75, p < .10$$

1947-
1956   85.7%   14.3%   N=14

1957-
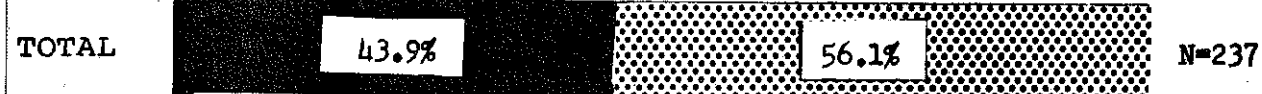1956   70.0%   30.0%   N=10   Unnatural Act and
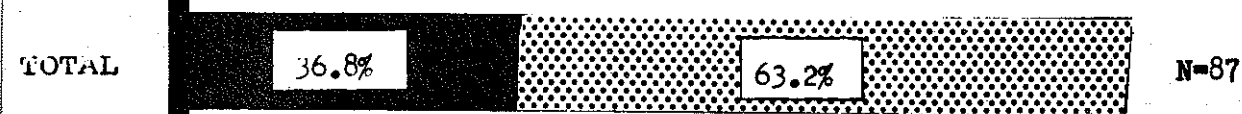   Sodomy

TOTAL   79.2%   20.8%   N=24

$$x^2 = .87, p < .50$$

PERCENT scale: 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Armed Robbery

1947-1956	51.6%	48.4%	N=93
1957-1966	38.9%	61.1%	N=144
TOTAL	43.9%	56.1%	N=237

X^2 3.71, p < .10

Robbery

1947-1956	41.7%	58.3%	N=24
1957-1966	34.9%	65.1%	N=63
TOTAL	36.8%	63.2%	N=87

X^2 = .34, p < .70

Aggravated Assaults

1947-1956	56.3%	43.7%	N=16
1957-1966	34.9%	65.1%	N=43
TOTAL	40.7%	59.3%	N=59
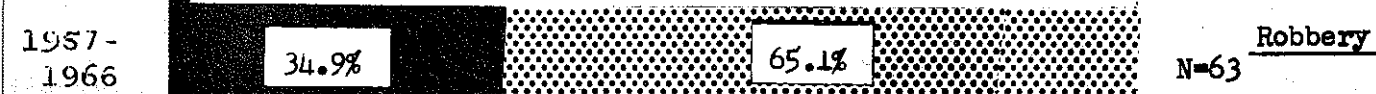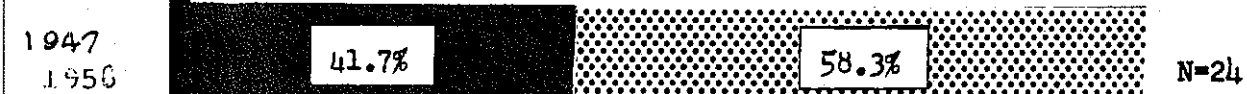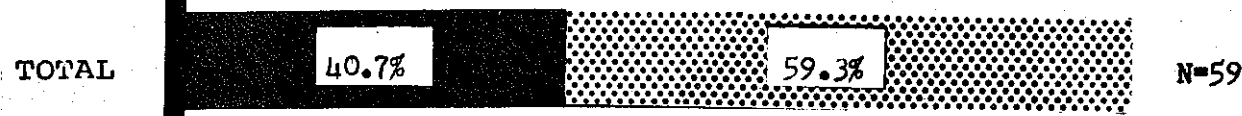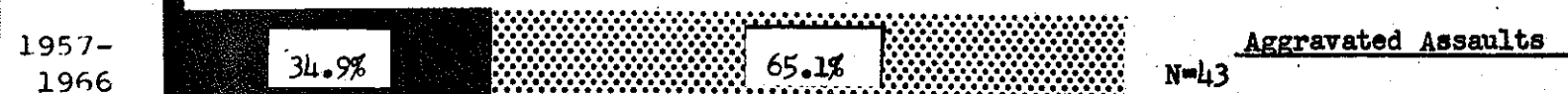
X^2 = 2.21, p < .20

An examination of the graphs reveals some interesting findings. Each of the ten offenses in graphs shows a reduction in the lengths of time served. The fact that all ten are in the same direction - i.e. toward less time served - is quite statistically significant in itself. The probability of this result occurring by chance is less than one in a thousand.

Ranked in the order of their statistical significance the offenses are:[*]

Offense	x^2	Probability
Breaking and Entering and Larceny	22.51	$p < .001$
Carnal Abuse	11.18	$p < .001$
Rape	3.75	$p < .10$
Armed Robbery	3.71	$p < .10$
Manslaughter	3.14	$p < .10$
Motor Vehicle Offenses	2.43	$p < .20$
Aggravated Assaults	2.21	$p < .20$
Larceny	1.31	$p < .30$
Unnatural Acts and Sodomy	.87	$p < .50$
Robbery	.34	$p < .70$

The analysis has indicated that society's reaction to criminal activities is not as severe in this decade as it has been in the previous two. Incarceration length for most offenses has decreased considerably. The dominant emphasis on isolating the offender from the community is being gradually replaced with a greater focus on re-integrating of the criminal into society.

Such concepts as parole, probation, jail credits, treatment programs and other recent innovations have undoubtedly affected the outcome of this project. Just how much each has contributed to the reduction of lengths of incarceration remains to be analyzed in the next report in this series which will hopefully be available this spring.

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[*]Statistical significance refers to the difference in the length of time served for each offense in the two decades under study.

DATA SHEET FOR LENGTH OF SENTENCE STUDY

1. Name _____

2. **Institution No.** _____

3. Date of Sentence _____

4. Date of Release _____

5. Total Time Incarcerated _____

6. Type of Release _____

7. Institution of Release _____

8. Date of Birth _____

9. Race _____

10. Birthplace _____

11. Education _____

12. Marital Status _____

13. Offense _____

14. No. of Prior State or Fed. Comms. _____

15. No. of Prior House of Corr. or Jail Comms. _____

16. No. of Juv. Comms. _____

17. Length of Sentence Imposed by Court _____

18. Sentencing Court _____

Further Commitments

	Date	Offense	Institution
(a)			
(b)			
(c)			
(d)			
(e)			

Parole Violations

	Date	Institution
(a)		
(b)		
(c)		
(d)		
(e)		